CITY WORKERS SPEAK – P4 • MIGRANT NEWS & VIEWS – P6

the indypendent
#287: MAY 2021

UNAFRAID: *A student protester at Fordham University at Lincoln Center.*

NEIL CONSTANTINE

YOUTH UPRISING

HOW A LIVE-STREAMED GENOCIDE & TONE-DEAF LEADERS IGNITED A NATIONWIDE CAMPUS REVOLT

BY JOHN TARLETON — P10

the indypendent

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CALENDAR

May/June

MAKE A SPLASH: *On June 29, The 32nd annual Dyke March will go down Fifth Ave from Bryant Park to Washington Square (pictured above).*

THURSDAYS • 7–8PM • FREE
YOGA EN MASSE: BROOKLYN FLOW AT PROSPECT PARK
Brooklyn's finest yoga teachers from different studios around the park lead free, outdoor group yoga classes in a low-pressure, beautiful environment,. Join hundreds of Brooklynites each week to celebrate yoga and wellness in Prospect Park. Bring your own mat or towel, a bottle of water and friends. Please RSVP and sign the waiver prior to your first class at *brooklynflow.com/prospectparkyoga.*
PROSPECT PARK
Long Meadow
BKLYN

WED MAY 15, 5PM & SAT MAY 18, 2PM
ALL OUT FOR GAZA NAKBA DAY PROTEST
Every year Within Our Lifetime holds a protest to commemorate the nakba, or "catastrophe" of 1947-48 when Zionists seized control of Palestine, killing 10,000 Palestinian, displacing 750,000 and depopulating over 400 villages in an act of ethnic cleansing that made Israel's founding possible. This year's Nakba demonstration promises to be larger than ever. Follow Within Our Lifetime on Twitter and Telegram for specifics about the day of action.
WED @ By Ridge Ave. & 5th Ave.
QNS
SAT @ Steinway St. & Astoria Blvd.
BKLYN

WED MAY 15 • 6:30–8PM • FREE
READINGS: *NAKBA THEN AND NOW: REFUSE SILENCE*
Join The Polis Project at The People's Forum for a night of readings to commemorate 76 years of the Nakba and to stand in solidarity with Palestine. The growing list of participants includes Ibtisam Azem, Maaza Mengiste, Najla Said, Mona Eltahawy, Suha Araj, Hafsa Kanjwal, Emna Zghal, Christina Dhanuja, Mukoma wa Ngugi, Anthony Alessandrini, Anna Arabindan Kesson, Zohra Saed, Siddhartha Deb, Sean Jacobs, Jee Leong Koh, Christopher Stone, Suchitra Vijayan and Bhakti Shringarpure. The Peoples Forum will be raising money for organizations fighting for Palestinian liberation.
THE PEOPLE'S FORUM
320 West 37th St.
MNHTN

MAY 24–27 • TICKETS START AT $25
FESTIVAL: BAM *DANCEAFRICA*
Celebrate the dance and music of Cameroon. The program, *The Origin of Communities / A Calabash of Cultures*, is a collaboration between the DanceAfrica Spirit Walkers and The Billie's Youth Arts Academy Dance Ensemble, joined by Women Of The Calabash, an ensemble known for its mesmerizing polyphonic sound. The artistic vision is brought to life with costumes, set design, and music and sounds that create an immersive experience. Go to *bam.org/danceafrica24* or call BAM at (718) 636-4100 for details.
PETER JAY SHARP BUILDING & HOWARD GILMAN OPERA HOUSE
30 Lafayette Ave.
BKLYN

MAY 24–30 • $16 ADULT • $11 SENIOR/CHILD
BAM PRESENTS *FILMAFRICA*
This cinematic companion to the annual *DanceAfrica* celebration showcases the best new narrative, documentary, and short films from across Africa and the diaspora, with a special focus on films from and about Cameroon. Curated by the 31st African Film Festival.
PETER JAY SHARP BUILDING
30 Lafayette Ave.
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SAT JUN 1 • 4–10PM
BRONX NIGHT MARKET
This night of food and community comes with a remarkable lineup of 50 local vendors, bringing together cuisines that reflect the community's pride, resilience and culture of the Bronx.
1 FORDHAM PLAZA
BX

WED JUN 5 • 8–9PM • $20
THE ANDY STATMAN TRIO AT BARBÈS
Andy Statman began his career in the 70's as a virtuoso mandolinist and became one of the main architects of a Klezmer revival. He has since influenced folk, jazz and improvisitational forms of music. Andy draws equally from Hassidic melodies to folk tunes from new and old worlds alike, to Albert Ayler-influenced free-improv. Featuring Larry Eagle on drums, Jim Whitney on bass, and Andy Statman on clarinet and mandolin. Reserve tickets early at *viewcy.com/e/the_andy_statman_trio_25.*
BARBÈS
376 9th St.
BKLYN

THU JUN 13 • 8PM • FREE
NEW YORK CITY PHILHARMONIC CONCERTS IN CENTRAL PARK
This summer Thomas Wilkins conducts the Orchestra in a program that ranges from classics by Beethoven, Elgar and Rimsky-Korsakov to Felix Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, with Randall Goosby as soloist, to new music by Carlos Simon and NY Phil Very Young Composers.
CUNNINGHAM PARK
193 St. Field
QNS

WED JUN 19 • 11:00AM–12:30PM • FREE
JUNETEENTH: *BROOKLYN AND THE ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT*
Juneteenth is a commemoration of the emancipation of enslaved African Americans in the United States. Join the Urban Park Rangers on a walk discussing Brooklyn's significant history to the abolitionist movement in the United States. *Contact Number: (646) 398-1479.*
BROOKLYN BRIDGE PARK
Furman St. & Old Fulton St., Pier 1
BKLYN

SAT JUN 22 • 12–6PM • FREE
THE FORTUNE SOCIETY'S CREATIVE ARTS FESTIVAL
Celebrate community, liberation and healing through the arts with the Long Island City-based non-profit dedicated to building people, not prisons. Enjoy family-friendly festivities, including hands-on art-making workshops, live music, spoken word performances, food for purchase and more. Bring some sunblock, grab a blanket or chair and hang out with us on the waterfront!
SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK
32-01 Vernon Blvd.
QNS

SAT JUN 29 • 5–8PM
32ND ANNUAL DYKE MARCH
Thousands of Dykes take the streets each year to celebrate beautiful and diverse Dyke lives and in protest of the discrimination, harassment, and violence faced in schools, on the job, and in their communities. The New York City Dyke March is a protest, not a parade. Any person who identifies as a dyke is welcome to march. The march begins at Bryant Park and goes down Fifth Ave. Washington Sq. Park. More at *nycdykemarch.com*.
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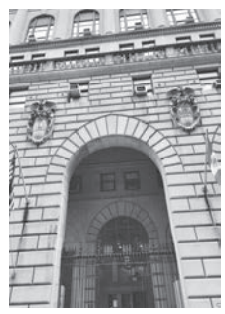

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ASH MARINACCIO

LEAF THEIR BUDGET ALONE: *New York City Parks workers and their park-loving allies rallied at Union Square on May 7 to demand that Mayor Adams rescind his plan for a $55 million cut to the Parks Department budget.*

City workers speak out

They describe how public services are being degraded by Mayor's budget cuts

By Indypendent Staff

Since 2022, the Adams administration has imposed multiple budget cuts on all city departments except the NYPD and the Department of Corrections. In June the Mayor and the City Council will complete negotiations on next year's city budget.

We've heard from city workers who described the devastating impact of previous austerity budgets amid concerns that another round of spending cuts will further degrade essential public services. We've withheld their names to protect them from retaliation.

PARKS

I work for the City Parks Department in urban ecology, maintaining tree canopies and other natural areas in the large parks on the edges of the five boroughs.

Our work feels like an invisibilized essential service — yet we maintain the lungs of the city. In this urban environment, trees regulate the temperature, purify the air and maintain livable space. It's something that my coworkers and I take pride in.

During nearly five years with Parks, I have benefitted from raises, more job responsibilities and creative freedoms. But I've also been a seasonal employee the whole time, which means my job depends on the budget and a city council vote. We experience constant job insecurity, and we find out only two or three weeks before the fiscal year ends whether or not we will be able to keep our positions.

This makes planning life difficult, whether it's signing a new lease, wanting to start a family or wanting to engage in anything that's costly — like taking a trip to visit family. Someone already lost their whole crew to other jobs as a result of foreseeable income loss. We had to start from scratch training and building a team. Backfilling those positions can take months, if it happens at all.

This year is particularly stressful, because back in November we were told my program might lose funding when Mayor Eric Adams threatened implementing across-the-board 15% budget cuts over the fiscal year — 5% three times — the worst the city has seen since the 1970s. He hasn't fully enacted the cuts yet, so we've been uneasy ever since, wondering what's gonna happen come June when the Mayor and City Council negotiate next year's annual city budget.

City employment is touted as a stable means of supporting a family. But there is a notable work-around — the lack of opportunities for permanent positions.

The City will hire non-union contractors instead of its own employees. The Parks Department hires many people under seasonal or temp positions that can't really be considered reliable or "good union jobs." It takes time to earn paid holidays, healthcare and sickdays.

There are around 25 employees in my department, and about 20 of us are on the seasonal lines. Almost all of the park rangers are also seasonal lines, and many of those who do public outreach at events are as well.

We also have the Parks Opportunity Program, which hires people to maintain the parks; they say it's a job opportunity for low-income and previously incarcerated New Yorkers. These are some of the lowest-paid workers at Parks. Their jobs are only six-month contracts, always ending before they gain access to full benefits!

Expanding the city's tree canopy is long-term work. To put it simply, trees don't mature in a year; they require maintenance to get to the point where they really benefit the city.

The short-sighted funding of our job makes planning difficult because we don't know if there will be employees to maintain current projects or to carry out future ones. Just the other day I was with a team that did a beautiful planting, but there was tangible tension in the air: We don't know if the new plants will be able to flourish with proper care — or if they will become unattended, overgrown by vines.

Think about a patch of sidewalk in the city with no trees versus another one with old sycamores and oaks lining the streets. The temperature could be 10 to 15 degrees cooler on the tree-lined block. That feeling on a hot summer day when you walk into a park under the shade of trees and immediately feel the temperature shift — that's what we're trying to maintain and bolster.

Even if there isn't a patch of trees right next to your house, plant growth affects the air and temperature of the city overall, the amount of water that gets absorbed when it rains, the wildlife and pollinators — the ecosystem as a whole — which, as urban as we are here in New York City, we are definitely are a part of.

Our parks are a health service; they have economic value, raising the price of nearby real estate. They also absorb water: Areas that lack parks and trees are more likely to see infrastructure damage and basement flooding when there is a storm.

Imagine if we actually funded these programs more and developed more urban canopy in the city. Imagine if we had several crews in every borough that educated the public about the trees in the area and the ecology around them that serves us. Imagine if we had the manpower to ensure the longevity of the trees here and create a better canopy; we would be a more climate-resilient city.

Imagine if we included the economic benefits of our forests and natural areas when considering the budget.

HEALTH + HOSPITALS

As a medical trainee, I find myself confronted with the stark reality of our underfunded healthcare system in New York City. "Why is [SUNY Downstate Hospital] shutting down? I do not know where to take my kids. I've been going there for years," one of my patients said as I was documenting our visit. My patient's distress over the shutdown of Downstate, a facility they've relied on for years, echoes the sentiments of many in our community. The root of this issue lies in budget cuts and misaligned priorities. While essential healthcare services suffer, we see ample resources going toward policing pro-Palestine protests against genocide.

Day-to-day I witness the strain on our healthcare system firsthand. Understaffed facilities, overworked technicians and residents, long emergency room waiting time, and limited access to vital resources like imaging machines, among other challenges, demonstrate the dire consequences of these budget constraints. Outdated electronic medical records further compound our challenges. We see the brunt

of these deficiencies falling disproportionately on the most vulnerable members of our society: low-income individuals, immigrants, the elderly and children.

As a healthcare professional, I refuse to turn a blind eye to these systemic failures! It's imperative that we advocate for proper funding and resource allocation to ensure equitable access to quality healthcare for all members of our community.

HOUSING

I am a city worker at the Department of Housing Preservation and Development. I help tenants learn about their rights, deal with abusive landlords and fight displacement. Our agency is launching the citywide Partners in Preservation program, which partners with tenant-organizing groups to assist people forming tenant associations. We provide funding, data and strategic support to organizers while also connecting them with code enforcement and legal services.

All tenants have rights, including the right to a safe home, to heat and hot water — and the right to organize —as well as protections against discrimination and landlord harassment.

However, many New Yorkers deal with poor living conditions and unresponsive landlords. Most affected are working-class tenants in communities of color, who are often the target of predatory investors, harassment and displacement as part of lucrative gentrification processes.

The creation of Partners in Preservation is a testament to the growing recognition in government that organizing is essential for helping tenants to uphold their rights.

When Eric Adams announced a hiring freeze and budget cuts last fall, we were told that our program might lose the majority, or all, of its funding. We also had to freeze hiring. This disruption significantly impacted our team's morale and our developing relationships with community organizers. The program will now launch a year later than planned.

Still, I remain excited about working with tenant organizers and about being able to continue the incredible history of housing activism in New York City — from the rent strikes of 1904 and 1907 to the first passage of rent control in 1920, to the creation of public housing in the 1930s, to the right to shelter won in the 1980s. As stated by the National Union of the Homeless, "You only get what you are organized to take!"

MAYOR'S OFFICE

I work in the mayor's Public Engagement Unit, a relatively new division in the Human Resources Administration (HRA). PEU is an outreach unit for the City's public services and programs designed to lessen the bureaucracy in accessing these services. We're expected to prioritize City Hall assignments on a rolling basis and to have near-constant flexibility when it comes to pivoting projects, clients, hours and often workdays.

Internally, budget cuts over time have created an accumulation of small slow-downs, such as outdated devices like Galaxy S10s for work phones and a notoriously slow intranet so unreliable it helped solidify a policy that forced employees to work from home. Larger impacts include the citywide hiring freeze that's been indefinite for years, our agency switching pension plans to cut costs, and budgets going unapproved for some PEU teams.

At PEU we've been assigned work directly engaging migrant families in the city in various stages of the asylum process as they become new New Yorkers. Doing this work I notice the glaring contradiction when an entity, the City in this case, is openly hostile to much of the community it serves. While budget squeezes on vital services — libraries, schools, mental-health and social services — have been a reality for decades, this year's heightened cuts have been framed as a result of the "migrant crisis."

On top of the uncontrollable hours and unpredictability of work, being fed anti-immigrant propaganda has been frustrating and insulting and is inextricably tied to why so many city workers have begun to unite under this cause. Workers like me are increasingly connecting the dots between their workplace struggles, the clients they serve and the colonized lands our clients come from — which echo many of our own histories.

The struggle for a free Palestine is the first time I've seen employees and union members across so many sectors rapidly unite under one cause. We're becoming aware that continuing to fund the militarization of the NYPD instead of providing critical resources that would see our communities thrive is the priority of the city elite, but not of its workers. Our voice is in the streets!

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DAN EFRAM

WORLD CITIZENS: *French-speaking African migrants participate in language class at the Earth Church in the Lower East Side.*

Nowhere to go

Migrants in flux after right to shelter repeal

By Ariana Orozco & Manuel Lopez

Sipping tea at the Lower East Side's Earth Church, a recent migrant from Guinea describes his journey from his home country in West Africa to Istanbul, Turkey; to Bogota, Colombia; to San Salvador, El Salvador; to Nicaragua; to Honduras; to Guatemala, to Mexico to finally reach the U.S. border. He is escaping years of political violence in his home country. He smiles though, saying he studied literature and philosophy in Guinea, that he took advantage of the journey to learn about each part of the world he stayed in. His hope to establish a better life in the United States, however, is waning after Eric Adams announced that New York City rolled back its longstanding Right to Shelter law for single adult migrants on March 15.

In 1981, the *Callahan Decree* established that the City was obligated to meet "the food and shelter needs" for needy individuals out of public concern. Under Adams' new policy, single migrants will have a limited 30 days to secure long-term housing and will not be allowed to apply for a shelter extension except under extreme circumstances. Families are still guaranteed unlimited shelter. The decision comes following a lengthy 10-month negotiation between City officials and the Legal Aid Society.

Over the past two years New York City has been a destination for an influx of migrants from all around the world, especially from Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. Many of these migrants are being bussed from Texas, where as of late February Republican Gov. Greg Abbott had spent $148 million sending over 102,000 migrants to New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, Denver and Washington, D.C., since April 2022. The sudden swell of migrants has put a strain on New York City's homeless shelters. There are roughly 120,000 people in the City's shelters, 65,000 of them recent migrants.

"New York City has led the nation in responding to a national humanitarian crisis, providing shelter and care to approximately 183,000 new arrivals since the spring of 2022," Adams said in a statement following his announcement. "But we have been clear, from day one, that the 'Right to Shelter' was never intended to apply to a population larger than most U.S. cities descending on the five boroughs in less than two years," said the mayor.

Shelter conditions have also been a major concern, even before the current migrant crisis. In 2021, *The City* found that 73% of 200 surveyed homeless individuals had been on the streets for at least a year; 38% of them decided to leave the shelters over safety concerns. Another migrant from Guinea escaping interpersonal violence attested to that trend, telling *The Indypendent*, "My living conditions have not been easy since arriving." This 30-day limit puts added stress on people already living in precarity.

At the Earth Church, where many African migrants gather on weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., the new policy is preoccupying everyone. Many men declined to speak about it, saying their situations were too nerve-wracking to discuss. One spoke bluntly: "I have nowhere to go." He was considering moving to Ohio, but with no English, no family here and no U.S. education, he is unsure of what new problems he might face if he leaves New York City.

"Thirty days are not enough, especially for someone who is fleeing from a bad situation in their home country," the Guinean student said about having such a limited buffer to acclimate to the U.S. before facing the street.

The City has not created additional resources for migrants on this new expedited timeline. Further, while New York City has sued the bus companies responsible for taking the migrants up North, it is yet to be seen if Gov. Abbott will halt the exportations. If the busses keep coming, there will be even less resources to meet them.

Some say our budget shouldn't go toward the migrants, but it will do little good to our city to shove thousands of asylum seekers who are still waiting for working permits onto the streets.

"I decided to seek asylum in the U.S. because I believe the U.S. respects the rule of law and the rights of man," said a man at Earth Church surrounded by dozens of others, all waiting to learn where their next destination might be.

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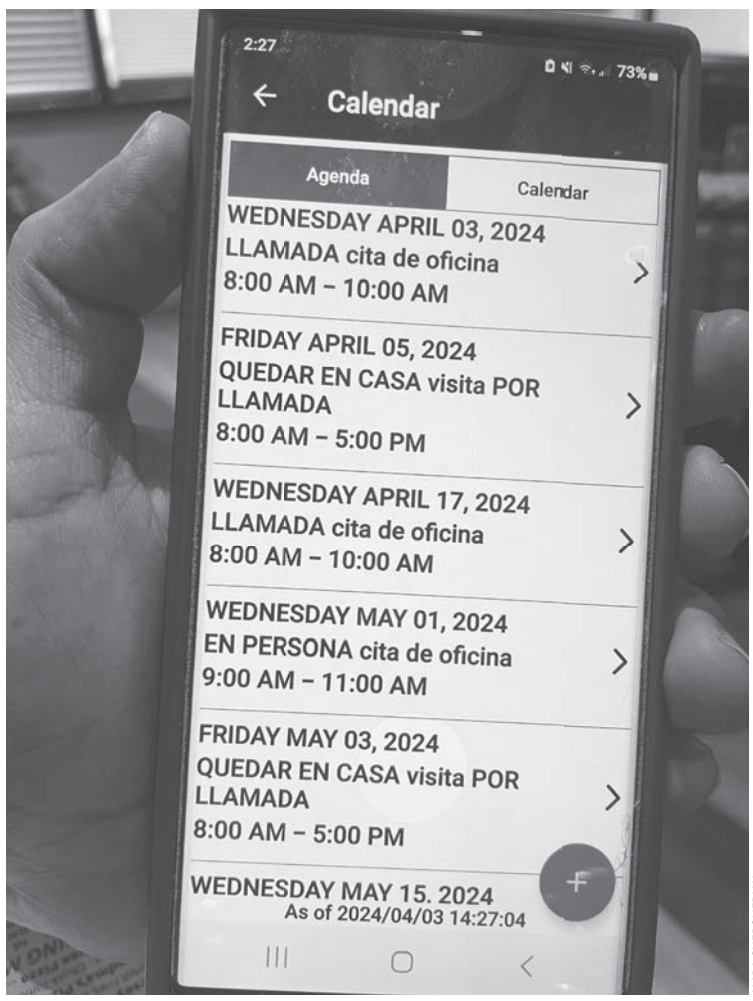

AMBA GUERGUERIAN

A life on ICE

Small-business owner and father of three on verge of deportation three years after leading epic hunger strike against immigrant detention

BASIC GUY: *Marcial Morales has been living in Hackettstown, N.J., since 1999. He has three children (ages 10, 12 and 18) and owns a pizzeria called Annabella Italian Restaurant.*

CONSTANT SURVEILLANCE: *ICE check-ins can make it difficult to follow a regular schedule.*

By Amba Guerguerian

"Before July 2018, I was basically free."

Marcial Morales explains that before his first encounter with the law nearly six years ago, he didn't grasp how "illegal" his existence in the United States really was as an undocumented migrant.

"To be honest, I didn't even know that was something you could go to jail for," he tells me. "I was free! I could buy a car; I could decide in a moment, 'Hey, I'm gonna go drive to a different state to visit someone in my family.'"

"I was just a regular guy," says Morales. "You know, I liked cars; I liked to hang out with my family; I didn't know really anything about the law."

Much has changed. Morales, like so many of the migrants facing deportation I have met over the years, knows the details of the immigration system. They learn it, usually, through a combination of inadequate private attorneys and having to navigate things *pro se*, for they don't have the right to representation in immigration court.

Morales takes time to walk me step-by-step through updates on the legal web he's been navigating for years. He understands the system better, in a much more personal way, than I do as an immigration reporter.

We first met in the fall of 2020 when he led dozens of other detained migrants in solitary confinement on hunger strike. He eventually won humanitarian parole after a nine-day hunger strike brought him to the brink of death.

Morales and I catch up at Annabella Italian Restaurant, the pizzeria he co-owns with his brother near Hackettstown in North Jersey. He had murals of pastoral Tuscany, a place he can only dream of visiting, painted on the walls. The restaurant gets a call for an order of 300 slices. I scold Morales for offering the client to pay when they pick up. "Hey, this is a family restaurant; we all believe in God," he laughs.

As we talk I notice a set of fine lines on his arm. They look out of place on a middle-aged man like Morales.

"Did you cut yourself?" I ask him.

"Yes, once when I was on the hunger strike in lock-up," he says, referring to solitary confinement. "I just needed to know if things were real."

Detention scarred Morales in other ways too. He can hardly sleep, still too panicked. His house is just a place where he stores things. "I probably only spent like three nights at my house last month," he tells me, pointing to a booth across the restaurant and saying, "I have back pain because I slept over there." Between Annabella's and crashing with various friends and family members, he's able to avoid the house that haunts him. That's where he's mentally at his worst. "At night, I see shadows and I'll think it's a guard passing by." It also doesn't help that it's at that house where his ICE check-ins occur.

LOCKED UP

Morales' legal ordeal began in July 2018 when his former mother-in-law called the cops on him. He sorely remembers never arriving to pick up his son the day he was booked. "Are you coming?" the child wrote in a text Morales still has saved on his phone today.

Morales was placed in the notoriously violent Essex County Jail in Newark, N.J., and due to his immigrant status, was deemed a flight risk and denied bail. After two years behind bars, the charges were dismissed. But instead of going home a free man, Morales was transferred to ICE detention at Bergen County Correctional Facility because of his undocumented status dating back to when he entered the country as a teenager.

At that time, Bergen was one of three North Jersey counties that had lucrative contracts with ICE where the agency rented out jail beds to use as immigration detention for people in deportation proceedings. When COVID-19 hit those facilities hard, the migrants, left in conditions of squalor, began to stage hunger strikes demanding their release on humanitarian parole, as there is no U.S. law requiring migrants to be incarcerated during deportation proceedings.

Morales became a leader in the movement, leading a strike of over forty fellow detainees. He taught himself about the legal rights detainees have — you have the right to refuse meals; they're not allowed to force feed you; if you consume anything other than water, you break your strike; don't believe them when they say everyone else stopped striking; they're not supposed to put you in lock-up as retaliation for hunger striking, but they will — and disseminated the information to dozens of other detainees that hunger struck together as a part of a national movement.

While he was in jail and detention, Morales also made drawings depicting his experiences: "It helped me process what was going on, and I had to record it somehow," he says. One shows guards beating a detained person; another shows the isolation of solitary; a third depicts him holding a handmade card from his son with a broken heart on it that reads, "For the best father. Happy father's day. I miss you dad. When are you coming home?"

After winning parole, Morales worked tirelessly to support his friends and comrades still on the inside. He sent (often out of his own pocket) whatever money he could to their commissary accounts, gave them words of encouragement and advice if they

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ASH MARINACCIO

Justice for non

Shady Scarcella prosecutors untainted by false convictions

By Theodore Hamm

One became the district attorney of one of New York's largest counties. Four became judges. Five assumed high-ranking positions in local DA offices. Several others moved on to successful careers in private practice.

One of the above even spent four terms in the House of Representatives.

Meanwhile, a grand total of zero assistant district attorneys (ADAs) experienced any public repercussions for overseeing a flawed murder conviction that involved notorious Brooklyn detective Louis Scarcella.

As of mid-April 2024, 21 cases involving Scarcella have resulted in reversal of the original trial verdicts — and two more saw juries acquit defendants after judges raised red flags about the prosecution's case.

The Indypendent's preliminary review of the Scarcella prosecutors' track records also reveals that at least six won convictions not involving the flashy detective that also resulted in overturned verdicts. Eric Bjorneby, currently a Nassau County judge, handled two dual-defendant cases that were reversed at the behest of the Brooklyn DA's Conviction Review Unit (CRU), producing four exonerations.

Soon after Scarcella's tactics were called into question by *The New York Times* in 2013, then-Brooklyn DA Joe Hynes announced the office would conduct an extensive review of murder cases in which Scarcella played an essential role. The DA's office says that the inquiry — which continued under Hynes' successors Ken Thompson and Eric Gonzalez, and included 77 cases that went to trial — is now mostly complete.

"You would think that at some point, somebody in the office might have said, 'Maybe we ought to look at other convictions by the ADAs who handled Scarcella's cases,'" says veteran New York City journalist Steve Fishman, co-host of *The Burden*, a podcast that includes extensive interviews with the notoriously theatrical detective and several exonerees.

But people familiar with the inner workings of the Brooklyn DA's office tell *The Indy* that no ADA's caseload was placed under the microscope. "We never found a pattern that merited an investigation of any individual prosecutors," recalls Jessica Wilson, a former ADA who worked in the CRU from 2014-17. Wilson investigated cases including Darryl Austin and Alvena Jennette, two of the first three Scarcella exonerations by the Conviction Review Unit in 2014. Bjorneby won both convictions.

An inquiry into the Scarcella prosecutors' track records likely would reveal patterns of police misconduct habitually condoned by the DA's office. It would almost certainly show that Scarcella was not the only NYPD detective that used dubious tactics resulting in faulty convictions during the 1980s-90s. Regardless of how many reversals it produces, an inquiry would yield at least some measure of accountability for the Brooklyn DA's office's own misdeeds.

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Persuaded by defendants, their lawyers and CRU investigators, the DA's office has thus far exonerated 13 men and one woman convicted of murder in a case that involved Scarcella. After challenges by their legal teams in court proceedings, seven other defendants ensnared by the detective saw their convictions overturned by state judges.

Except for David Ranta, all of the Scarcella reversals have involved people of color, nearly all Black men. The CRU, meanwhile, has exonerated nearly two dozen more men with wrongful murder convictions in non-Scarcella cases (all people of color). Yet in most instances, the office has not identified the trial prosecutor or highlighted problems in the ADA's handling of the case.

"Public shaming and blaming individuals (as opposed to systemic issues) are not part of the objective" when the office reviews past cases, says Oren Yaniv, director of communications for Brooklyn DA Eric Gonzalez.

Veterans of the trenches explain that the practice of not identifying the trial prosecutors in reversed convictions is standard operating procedure.

"Generally, DA offices don't name the ADAs at fault because they want to avoid branding that person with a 'Scarlet Letter' that might hurt their future legal career," says Abe George, a former Manhattan ADA who became a member of Brooklyn DA Ken Thompson's transition team. George adds that the offices commonly fear that "singling out the prosecutors might make it harder to recruit future ADAs."

A recent report issued by the Zimroth Center at New York University's School of Law takes a different approach. Undertaken with the support of DA Larry Krasner, "Prosecutorial Misconduct in the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office" identifies the ADAs in the overturned convictions it documents. In addition to building public trust and accountability, and potentially spurring policy shifts, the Zimroth team argues that naming the prosecutors may spark an "audit or scrutiny" of that ADA's other cases.

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In July 2022, Brooklyn DA Eric Gonzalez's office announced it would exonerate three defendants in the notorious late 1995 murder of MTA worker Harry Kaufman, who was killed by a fire ignited in his token booth at the Kingston Avenue stop in Bed Stuy. Echoing NYPD Commissioner Bill Bratton, Republican presidential frontrunner Bob Dole linked the incident to *The Money Train*, a schlocky Hollywood flick that opened just before the murder. The case made Scarcella a tabloid celebrity.

As the CRU's exoneration reports document, there were multiple problems with Scarcella's actions. For starters, none of the three men that he and his longtime sidekick Detective Stephen Chmil reeled in — James Irons, Thomas Malik and Vincent Ellerbe — matched the descriptions of the assailants provided by Kaufman, who spent two weeks in the hospital before dying. The victim further said there were two culprits, not three.

Defendant James Irons had even called 911 to report the token-booth blaze, a rather unusual action by an alleged arsonist. Scarcella and Chmil eventually extracted a "confession" from Irons, who was 18 years old and not literate. That statement implicated Malik (18) and Ellerbe (17), both of whom gave similarly dubious confessions, with Scarcella and Chmil handling Malik's interrogation. At a lineup, Malik was the only one wearing a red shirt.

After a lengthy investigation, the CRU concluded that the three confessions were faulty and that in the dual trials of Malik and Ellerbe, Scarcella "likely misled the jury" regarding a shaky key witness named Jacqueline Robinson. According to defense lawyer Ron Kuby, who represented Malik at trial and handled the case while it was in the CRU, the Brooklyn ADA who recorded Robinson's statement was none other than Mark Hale. From 2014 through 2021, Hale helmed the CRU.

In its three reports on the exonerations, the

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HOUSE OF PAIN: *The Kings County Courthouse in Downtown Brooklyn.*

CRU did not mention Hale. Nor did the unit identify Lori Grifa and Joe Alexis, the ADAs that handled the Irons trial, or Jonathan Frank, who joined his colleagues in convicting Malik and Ellerbe. According to the reports, the CRU interviewed the prosecutors, who provided "nothing new" about the cases — except for the fact that Robinson was "fooling around with her boyfriend" in a car when she allegedly spotted Malik and Ellerbe near the nocturnal crime scene.

The CRU extensively criticized the prosecution's work in one of the three cases. During the closing argument in Ellerbe's trial, the team "exceeded the bounds of proper conduct by making misleading representations about witness testimony [and] physical evidence, and encouraging inferences of guilt based on facts not in evidence."

The report then provided a laundry list of falsehoods presented by the ADAs to the jury, including "misstat[ing] the deceased's account repeatedly throughout the summation." Nonetheless, the CRU concluded by blaming Scarcella and Chmil, not the prosecutors, for Ellerbe's wrongful conviction.

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In a current federal lawsuit on behalf of Thomas Malik, attorneys Ron Kuby and Rhiya Trivedi highlight the actions of ADA Lori Grifa. After the overnight grilling by Scarcella and Chmil resulted in Irons' dubious confession, Grifa showed up at the precinct around 6 a.m. to videotape Irons' statement.

"Rather than have Irons describe the alleged events in his own words," state Kuby and Trivedi, "ADA Grifa primarily asked yes/no questions and provided the account herself." Despite her "coaxing" and "prompting," Irons gave answers that diverged from the version found in the detectives' report. Even though Malik's name appeared frequently in the written statement, Irons could not remember it when speaking to Grifa.

While the CRU did not identify Grifa or criticize her role in affirming Irons'

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23 FALSE CONVICTIONS

DEFENDANT	CONVICTION OVERTURNED	YEARS LOCKED UP	TRIAL PROSECUTOR	PROSECUTOR'S SUBSEQUENT CAREER
Ronnie Poindexter	1997	5	Nicholas Fengos	NYS Dept. of Corrections attorney
Antowine Butts	2000	2	Kathleen Rice	Nassau DA; Congress
David Ranta	2013	23	Suzanne Mondo/ Barry Schreiber	NYC Criminal Court judge Private practice
Darryl Austin & Alvena Jennette	2014	13 20	Eric Bjorneby*	Nassau Judge
Robert Hill	2014	27	Neil Ross	NYC Criminal Court judge
Roger Logan	2014	17	John Holmes	Private practice
Derrick Hamilton	2015	24	Anne Gutmann	Brooklyn DA bureau chief
Shababa Shakur	2015	27	Richard Shiarella	Private practice
Carlos Davis	2015	27	Jeff Ginsberg	Private practice
Vanessa Gathers	2016	11	Hilda Mortensen	Nassau DA appeals bureau
Jabbar Washington	2017	21	Kyle Reeves/ Jeff Mueller	Staten Island ADA Private practice
John Bunn & Rosean Hargrave	2018	16 24	Ed Boyar	Retired as Brooklyn ADA
Sundhe Moses	2018	18	Lance Ogiste/ Jeffrey Levitt	Remains Brooklyn ADA Private practice
Shawn Williams	2018	25	Lance Ogiste	
Eliseo DeLeon**	2019	23	Nancy Ryan	Unclear
Gerard Domond	2021	29	Paul Maggiotto	Private practice
Sam Edmonson	2022	33	Daniel Saunders	Current Queens DA executive
James Irons	2022	27	Lori Grifa/ Joe Alexis	New Jersey court judge Current Brooklyn DA executive
Thomas Malik & Vincent Ellerbe	2022	27 25	Jonathan Frank/ Grifa/Alexis	Private practice
Steven Ruffin	2024	14	Caryn Stepner	Nassau DA unit chief
TOTAL YEARS INCARCERATED		**425+**		

** Also handled David McCallum and Willie Stuckey (exonerated October 2014)*
*** Convicted in retrial in August 2022*

KIMBERLY IZAR

HOUSING FOR ALL: *Housing activists protest for Good Cause Eviction inside the state capitol building in Albany.*

NYC BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

STATE BUDGET OKS THIN EVICTION PROTECTIONS; WEAKENS RENT CONTROLS

The New York State budget approved April 20 includes a law protecting tenants in unregulated apartments from being evicted without a "good cause" such as not paying rent — but denies those protections to most of those renters. The Housing Justice for All (HJ4A) coalition estimates that the law enacted "excludes at least 3.4 million tenants," seven-eighths of those the original Good Cause bill would have covered. It requires local governments outside New York City to opt in to the protections instead of making them automatic; it exempts all buildings constructed after 2009 for 30 years; and it doesn't cover buildings where the landlord owns 10 or fewer units — which will likely enable fraud, as ownership is commonly masked by limited-liability corporations. Gov. Kathy Hochul "pushed through a housing deal written by the real-estate industry," HJ4A director Cea Weaver charged. The budget bill also reopens loopholes in rent stabilization closed by the 2019 law that limited rent increases for renovated apartments to less than $90 a month. Now landlords can raise rents permanently by up to $175 per month, or by as much as $350 if the previous tenant lived in the unit for 25 years or more.

STATE BUDGET DEAL PRESERVES SUNY DOWNSTATE HOSPITAL

Gov. Kathy Hochul's proposal to close SUNY Downstate Medical Center in East Flatbush and move some of its services to the city's Kings County Hospital across the street got removed from the state budget. Instead, the hospital will get $100 million to cover operating expenses and $300 million for capital needs, and a community advisory board will be created to discuss plans for "modernization and revitalization." The proposal to close the 342-bed facility drew massive local opposition, as it has the only kidney-transplant program in Brooklyn and one of two centers for high-risk pregnancies and births. "I am especially pleased that Central Brooklyn was heard," state Sen. Zellnor Myrie, whose district encompasses the hospital, told *Caribbean Life*. SUNY Downstate treats 400,000 patients a year and gets more of its revenue from Medicaid than any hospital in the state, according to United University Professions, which represents around 2,300 medical workers there and will have a seat on the advisory board.

STATE AG RELEASES BODY-CAMERA FOOTAGE OF QUEENS SHOOTING

The New York Attorney General's office released body-camera video May 3 of the police killing of Win Rozario, 19, who was shot at his home in Ozone Park, Queens, March 27 while he was having a mental-health episode. The video shows Rozario moving toward the cops with a pair of scissors and his mother wresting them from his hands, but she put them down after police ordered her to get out of the way. Rozario then grabbed the scissors again and was shot four times. The video shows the teen, who had called 911 himself, was on the opposite side of the kitchen from the cops at the time. "The video that was released makes it clear that Win should be alive, but the police came and murdered him in our kitchen," Rozario's family said in a statement. "The police created a crisis and killed him in cold blood."

COUNCIL SEEKS PROBE OF TOP COPS' SOCIAL-MEDIA RANTS

City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams has asked the City Department of Investigation to probe high-ranking police officials' social-media attacks on their critics. In a letter obtained by *The New York Times*, the speaker said recent posts on NYPD accounts "targeted public officials and members of the public" with "intimidating and dangerous" epithets. Adams specifically cited Chief of Patrol John Chell calling Councilmember Tiffany Cabán (D-Queens) "a person who hates our city" on X after she criticized the arrests of anti-genocide protesters at Columbia University and City College. "It not only threatens our democracy," Cabán told *The Times*, "but our safety as well." A spokesperson for Mayor Eric Adams said she hoped the investigation would also cover "the unprofessional actions of these small number of Councilmembers."

The perfect storm

How a live-streamed genocide, clueless college administrators and heavy-handed policing ignited America's college campuses

NEEL CONSTANTINE

NEEL CONSTANTINE

DAN EFRAM

By John Tarleton

Biden blinked!

Maybe.

As *The Indypendent* goes to press, Joe Biden has just announced in a television interview that he will withhold the bombs and artillery shells that Israel could use in a full-scale invasion of Rafah, the southernmost city in the Gaza Strip where more than 1.2 million Palestinian refugees are sheltering in tents with little to no food or water and nowhere to go to.

"If they go into Rafah, I'm not supplying the weapons," Biden told CNN's Erin Burnett.

After seven months of U.S.-sponsored carnage in Gaza, It takes a measure of optimism to believe this will be the time when Biden finally restrains Israel. But he has many reasons to do so.

Relations with key allies in Europe and the Middle East, where a Rafah bloodbath would be poorly received, are surely a factor in the president's decision. Assuming Biden thwarts Israel's plans for Rafah, everyone who carried out campus occupations, who faced police assaults and went to jail, who experienced academic suspension or expulsion deserves our gratitude, as do all the faculty and "outside agitators" who made common cause with them. They may have helped save tens of thousands of innocent Palestinian lives, many of them children.

The encampment movement that began on April 17 at Columbia University and spread like wildfire across the country marks the largest eruption of campus protest in the U.S. since the height of the Vietnam War. The protesters have faced violent police repression and have been smeared repeatedly by the corporate media as Jew-hating antisemites for the simple act of opposing a genocide. And still they have persist.

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Once the encampment movement got underway, I fell into a late-night ritual of scrolling social-media feeds to see where new Gaza solidarity encampments had taken root — their domed tents sprouting like mushrooms following a spring rain shower — and where they were being ripped up and cast aside by authority figures who refused to hear young people's call for moral clarity in the face of a U.S.-backed genocide.

The scenes of brutality unfolded in a blur — phalanxes of highly armed robocops marching across idyllic college campuses to trash the encampments, batter any protesters who stood in their way, and haul them off to jail.

Rampaging police have given us many viral moments to remember — here in New York City, legions of cops gathered outside Columbia University to dismantle the encampment, a reminder of what the City has been spending its money on while funding is cut from other public services that enrich our lives.

At the University of Texas, state troopers on horseback charged into crowds of student protesters. In Los Angeles, police spent hours firing rubber bullets and flashbang grenades into a barricaded encampment on the UCLA campus. At Indiana and Ohio State, snipers were spotted on rooftops watching for signs of menace below as if they were operating inside an insurgent-held town in Iraq.

Annelise Orlick, 65, the former chair of Dartmouth College's Jewish Studies department, was slammed to the ground by police and taken to jail along with 88 others who were protesting on the campus green that night.

"It was a very minor, mild protest," she told Huffington Post. "There were multi-faith expressions of solidarity, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Christian."

At Emory University in Atlanta, Noëlle McAfee, Chair of the Philosophy Department, was captured on video being led away in zip cuffs by a warrior cop whose face was concealed by a mask — a clear warning about the rise of an authoritarian tendency in this country that runs deeper than Trump.

For the targets of this onslaught, it was a small taste of the brutality the Palestinians have endured for decades.

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Most universities are sprawling entities. The movement's first encampment at Columbia University occupied one lawn in the campus quadrangle. The organizers were quite intentional in maintaining a chill, peaceful vibe. It was easy enough for any student to walk by and ignore the encampment on the way to class, or if the political chants were too annoying, put on a pair of air pods. The hundreds of other campus encampments that have been launched in Columbia's wake have been similarly peaceful venues where ideas are discussed, food is shared, art is made, poetry is read. They are held, in most cases, on a patch of grass or in a single plaza or building in the middle of the college campus. The violence begins when the police — the real outside agitators — attack the camps and, in some cases, when pro-Israel trolls try to provoke confrontations.

I was in college in the 1980s when activists with tents erected "shantytowns" on their campuses to pressure universities to divest from companies that did business with apartheid South Africa. College administrators weren't happy about the shantytowns. But the violent repression we're seeing now was unthinkable then. In time, many universities ended up acceding to demands to divest their financial holdings from companies that did business with South Africa, giving a boost to the global movement to end apartheid.

So why the massive crackdown this time?

The most immediate reason is that U.S. elites are far more committed to Israel than they were to apartheid South Africa, a Cold War ally that had outlived its usefulness. For Zionists, the students' demands that universities divest from companies that are complicit in Israel's repression of the Palestinians is deeply unsettling.

Israel is an apartheid state built on the belief that the seven million Jews who live between "the river and the sea" have the right to subjugate the seven million native Palestinians who also live there, stealing their land and resources and relegating those who live inside Israel's pre-1967 borders to a third-class citizenship and imposing military rule on the rest. There's a reason MAGA leaders like Donald Trump and Steve Bannon adore Israel.

None of this can be defended in an open and honest debate. Instead, Israel's critics are routinely denounced as "antisemites," even Jewish activists who consistently oppose all forms of racism including antisemitism.

Israel's supporters are keenly aware that apartheid South Africa's demise in the early 1990s was spurred by its international isolation. And that, in turn, was the product of decades of activism around the world in support of that country's Black-led freedom movement.

For protest-averse campus administrators who are attuned to wealthy donors at private universities and pro-Israel politicians at public university systems like CUNY and SUNY, even partially yielding to the students and agreeing to engage in further discussions of divestment — as a handful of universities have done so far — is to suggest Israel belongs on the same moral plane as apartheid South Africa.

So instead of taking their students' pleas seriously to divest from Israel, university presidents call in the cops. In doing so, they are betraying the liberal ideals of free speech and openness to new ideas that they claim are at the heart of their school's educational mission.

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Around 3,000 Americans were killed on September 11, 2001, when terrorists hijacked four jet airplanes and crashed them into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and an empty field in Pennsylvania. It was widely seen as one of the darkest days in U.S. history. What followed was much worse. The George W. Bush administration responded by funneling the public's desire for revenge into starting forever wars that killed hundreds of thousands of people in two countries, Afghanistan and Iraq, that had little to nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks. The government also created a sprawling new Department of Homeland Security, gave the FBI vast new spying powers, and initiated programs to transfer surplus military gear to local police departments. These departments increasingly trained their officers to see themselves as warriors operating in urban battlefields filled with potential enemy combatants who have to be suppressed with overwhelming force at the slightest hint of disorder. As the official response to campus protests shows, the post-9/11 security state has never stopped growing, like a malignant tumor on the body politic.

Meanwhile, politicians and the media have relentlessly conditioned the public to embrace "security" — as they define it — as the ultimate public good. The men and women in uniform who provide it are always to be showered with gratitude for "ensuring" our "freedom."

One absurd example of this unfolded a few months ago when New York Gov. Kathy Hochul ordered 1,000 state police and rifle-toting national guardsmen to supplement the NYPD in patrolling the subway system after several high-profile incidents of commuters being pushed off subway platforms by individuals in mental-health crisis. How this action would prevent such random acts of violence was never explained. When you have a hammer, every problem looks like a nail.

The massive George Floyd protests in the summer of 2020 were supposed to be a moment of reckoning with both America's structural racism and its violent system of policing. Neither happened. Amid an uptick in crime at the height of the pandemic and hysterical cries about a defunding of the police that never happened, modest reform proposals were shelved and the old status quo reasserted itself.

One "reform" the police and their allies agreed on was that the cops needed better training. But training in what? The answer has emerged most dramatically in Atlanta. There, activists have waged a multi-year struggle to stop the razing of a forest to build a massive

Continued on page 15

IN THE BEGINNING: *Two of the roughly 100 Columbia students who were arrested on April 18, one day after establishing the first Gaza solidarity encampment on the campus quad. Their mass arrest helped ignite a nationwide movement.*

HOW TO USE ONE'S PRIVILEGE: *A CUNY faculty member shows up to help protect the student-led encampment at the City College of New York.*

FOR THE CAUSE: *More than 2,700 college students have been arrested on their campuses since the encampment movement began.*

JOHN TARLETON

CUNY FOR PALESTINE: *The Gaza solidarity encampment at the City College of New York in Harlem.*

Youth movements, then & now

Today's protests are bringing tears to aging radicals such as myself

By Linda Martín Alcoff

I was 22 years old before I experienced police violence up-close and personal. I was not naïve or uninformed: I was a Marxist, working with veterans of the civil-rights and anti-war movements, and had been in numerous demos with armed troops pointing their guns toward us from roof tops. But until that day, I had never experienced a police charge on protesters.

Those prior demos were majority-white, while the one I was currently in was not, and the significance of this was not lost on me. Previously, we were threatened, photographed, yelled at. Not charged with clubs.

I confess that, when it started, I was shocked. These were Vietnam vets they were beating; some were disabled. They didn't come after any of the women.

That is, until, to my own surprise, I decided to try to get the billy club out of a cops' hands who was brutalizing a friend right next to me. I was six months pregnant. I could have lost my first-born son that day.

Most importantly, there is no question that the first-hand experience of unprovoked police violence taught me something that day that could not be learned from books.

Today's movements are bringing tears to aging radicals, such as myself, who remember our 'glory days' with fondness and nostalgia but also, sometimes, bitter disappointment.

The mass mobilizations and sacrifices made by young people in the '60s and '70s went a long way toward ending (overt) Jim Crow segregation and the Vietnam War. It shocked their parents, university administrations and the power brokers in every sector of society. But the movements folded too quickly — just as we were gaining steam. Reagan was elected with a landslide. Mass support for soldiers (manifested by ubiquitous yellow ribbons) replaced the critique of militarism. Civil rights became overshadowed by mass incarceration. Women's liberation led to cut-throat careerism and somehow could not defeat a reemergence of "Real Housewives."

After 9/11, the country was embroiled in even larger imperial wars, systematic torture, sanctioned Islamophobia and increased covert surveillance. Even though the military leadership became more diverse, the imperial project never waned. Unilateral interventions continued despite critique from international courts and large coalitions of nations from the global South, and racist police violence continues today despite upsurges of protest over the last decade.

This is a tale that supports fatalism. The status quo seems even more empowered today by packed courts and the corporate media. Yet, today's headlines — with more than 2,000 arrests in late April and early May from pro-Palestine encampments and marches roiling the country — are puncturing this attitude of resignation.

Is it a false hope?

My students at CUNY are certainly getting their own dose of first-person experience: unprovoked police violence, our Kafkaesque carceral system and misinformation circulating even in 'responsible' segments of the press. Before I can talk to them about their latest chapter draft, we have to go over jail support, petition drives, and how to navigate around faculty and administrators who support Israel's war on Gaza. They are learning organizational skills as well as political lessons about the hard stops operating within our democratic society. I know these lessons will stay with them.

I see three reasons for hope in the current upsurge, reasons that go beyond ending the current war, that build a sentiment against the current form of capitalism we are suffering from.

First, the students and youth involved in the protests are learning a lot about strategy and tactics. Encampments have heightened the contradictions, provided a way to make commitment visible, and created a space where conversations can happen within groups as well as with others. Calls for divestment inspire an analysis of the political economy of higher education, revealing where to aim the public campaign. And having to respond to the violence from both police and right-wing provocateurs has required collective practice, following an agreed upon plan of action, restraining individual responses, learning (by doing) non-violent resistance, and accepting leadership from feminists and other movement veterans, whether or not they have PhDs in social theory. And, as I can tell from conversations, their energy and excitement is high — no insignificant feat in these hard times.

These lessons, I believe, will stay with most of these students throughout their lives, giving an actual real-world glimpse of another way to make society work.

Second, student debts, even above $100,000 at some of these schools, has not proved to be a deterrent to action in the face of genocide. Political leaders in the United States saw the upsurges of the '60s and '70s as excessive democracy, and conservative think tanks plotted demobilization through tightening the options for career advancement. The exorbitant costs of law school and medical school (so different than in other countries) affects what kind of law and medicine students can choose; the costs of just a four-year degree keep kids working through school and willing to accept morally noxious work after college. Loan debt affects democratic participation, increasing the price of a middle-class life in moral terms.

Yet students have come out anyway, risking expulsion, arrest records, loss of family support. Ballooning tuition costs has not kept our students in line.

And third, and most importantly perhaps, in this upsurge personal stakes have not been necessary as a motive to mobilize. The encampments range beyond Palestinians and Jews to capture a generation that wants to able to live a moral life, free of guilt.

The youth activism of the '60s and '70s was not admired by all leftists at the time. The Communist Party was critical of the focus on "bourgeois democracy," and numerous academic leftists such as Theodor Adorno saw the movements as undisciplined, untheoretical, libidinous.

Adorno's compatriot, Herbert Marcuse, analyzed the new movements with a more generous assessment, yet also astute. The surprise in the '60s, he wrote, was that these movements involved middle-class students, young people with a future, at a time when economies were booming across the dominant nations of the Global North. These were not demonstrators driven by desperation as in the 1930s, but youth with a larger vision of the good life than fat salaries and homes in the suburbs. He wrote in *An Essay on Liberation* that they were demanding no less than "new ways and forms of life." He said "they have learned not to identify themselves with the false fathers who have built and tolerated and forgotten the Auschwitz's and Vietnams of history." They have learned that remembering these lessons is the way toward a moral life free of guilt.

The youth movement was not merely motivated by self realization or individual freedom, Marcuse wrote, but by a commitment to "goals which enhance, protect, and unite life on earth."

Those battles unite with today's.

Linda Martín Alcoff is a professor of philosophy at Hunter College and the CUNY Graduate Center. She is the author of five books including The Future of Whiteness *and* Race & Racism: A Decolonial Approach.

LYNNE FOSTER

We need an exodus from Zionism

Let's claim our freedom from a project that commits genocide in our name

By Naomi Klein

I've been thinking about Moses and his rage when he came down from the mount to find the Israelites worshipping a golden calf.

The ecofeminist in me was always uneasy about this story: What kind of God is jealous of animals? What kind of God wants to hoard all the sacredness of the Earth for himself?

But there is a less literal way of understanding this story. It is about false idols. About the human tendency to worship the profane and shiny, to look to the small and material rather than the large and transcendent.

What I want to say to you tonight at this revolutionary and historic Seder in the Streets is that too many of our people are worshipping a false idol once again. They are enraptured by it. Drunk on it. Profaned by it.

That false idol is called Zionism.

It is a false idol that takes our most profound biblical stories of justice and emancipation from slavery — the story of Passover itself — and turns them into brutalist weapons of colonial land theft, roadmaps for ethnic cleansing and genocide.

It is a false idol that has taken the transcendent idea of the promised land — a metaphor for human liberation that has traveled across multiple faiths to every corner of this globe — and dared to turn it into a deed of sale for a militaristic ethnostate.

Political Zionism's version of liberation is itself profane. From the start it required the mass expulsion of Palestinians from their homes and ancestral lands in the Nakba.

From the start it has been at war with dreams of liberation. At a Seder it is worth remembering that this includes the dreams of liberation and self-determination of the Egyptian people. This false idol of Zionism equates Israeli safety with Egyptian dictatorship and client states.

From the start it has produced an ugly kind of freedom that saw Palestinian children not as human beings but as demographic threats — much as the pharaoh in the Book of Exodus feared the growing population of Israelites and thus ordered the death of their sons.

Zionism has brought us to our present moment of cataclysm, and it is time that we said clearly: It has always been leading us here.

It is a false idol that has led far too many of our own people down a deeply immoral path that now has them justifying the shredding of core commandments: Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not covet.

It is a false idol that equates Jewish freedom with cluster bombs that kill and maim Palestinian children.

Zionism is a false idol that has betrayed every Jewish value, including the value we place on questioning — a practice embedded in the Seder with its four questions asked by the youngest child.

Including the love we have as a people for text and for education.

Today, this false idol justifies the bombing of every university in Gaza; the destruction of countless schools, of archives, of printing presses; the killing of hundreds of academics, of journalists, of poets — this is what Palestinians call scholasticide, the killing of the means of education.

Meanwhile, in this city, the universities call in the NYPD and barricade themselves against the grave threat posed by their own students daring to ask them basic questions such as, "How can you claim to believe in anything at all, least of all us, while you enable, invest in and collaborate with this genocide?"

The false idol of Zionism has been allowed to grow unchecked for far too long.

So tonight we say: It ends here.

Our Judaism cannot be contained by an ethnostate, for our Judaism is internationalist by nature.

Our Judaism cannot be protected by the rampaging military of that state, for all that military does is sow sorrow and reap hatred — including against us as Jews.

Our Judaism is not threatened by people raising their voices in solidarity with Palestine across lines of race, ethnicity, physical ability, gender identity and generations.

Our Judaism is one of those voices and knows that in that chorus lies both our safety and our collective liberation.

Our Judaism is the Judaism of the Passover Seder: the gathering in ceremony to share food and wine with loved ones and strangers alike, the ritual that is inherently portable, light enough to carry on our backs, in need of nothing but each other. No walls, no temple, no rabbi, a role for everyone, even — especially — the smallest child. The Seder is a diaspora technology if ever there was one, made for collective grieving, contemplation, questioning, remembering and reviving the revolutionary spirit.

So look around. This, here, is our Judaism. As waters rise and forests burn and nothing is certain, we pray at the altar of solidarity and mutual aid no matter the cost.

We don't need or want the false idol of Zionism. We want freedom from the project that commits genocide in our name. Freedom from an ideology that has no plan for peace other than deals with murderous theocratic petrostates next door, while selling the technologies of robo-assassinations to the world.

We seek to liberate Judaism from an ethnostate that wants Jews to be perennially afraid, that wants our children to be afraid, that wants us to believe the world is against us so that we go running to its fortress and beneath its iron dome, or at least keep the weapons and donations flowing.

That is the false idol.

And it's not just Netanyahu, it's the world he made and that made him — it's Zionism.

What are we? We, in these streets for months and months, are the exodus. The exodus from Zionism.

And to the Chuck Schumers of this world, we do not say, "Let our people go."

We say,"We have already gone. And your kids? They're with us now."

This is a transcript of a speech delivered April 23 at the Emergency Seder in the Streets held in Grand Army Plaza near Sen. Chuck Schumer's home where approx. 200 of the demonstrators were arrest.

MOSAB ABU TOHA

Fly a kite for Rafeet Alareer

WORDS TO LIVE BY: *Slain Gazan poet Rafeet Alareer loved to pick strawberries. Poet Mosab Abu Toha, a dear friend of Alareer, posted this photo after he was killed.*

By Amba Guerguerian

On Dec. 6, an Israeli airstrike on a family home in northern Gaza killed Refaat Alareer, his brother, sister and her four children.

Alareer was a beloved Palestinian writer, professor and activist. A public critic of Israel's occupation of Palestine, he worked with young writers to foster textured and nuanced literature from Gaza.

According to Geneva-based human rights organization Euro-Med Monitor, the apartment Alareer and his family were in on Dec. 6, which belonged to his sister, "was surgically bombed out of the entire building where it's located."

Israel has destroyed every university in the Gaza Strip and as of Jan. 20 had killed at least 94 professors. "Many of their ideas served as cornerstones of academic research in the Gaza Strip's universities," writes Euro-Med.

"Nothing happens by accident," an Israeli intelligence source told *+972 Magazine* in November. "When a three-year-old girl is killed in a home in Gaza, it's because someone in the army decided it wasn't a big deal for her to be killed … We are not Hamas. These are not random rockets. Everything is intentional. We know exactly how much collateral damage there is in every home."

On Feb. 26, Alareer's daughter Shymaa, her husband Muhammad Abd al-Aziz Siyam and their three-month-old son Abd al-Rahman were killed by Israel in Gaza City. *The Electronic Intifada* reported they were the only people at the international relief charity Global Communities building when it was airstruck, the other occupants having vacated a few days prior.

Shortly after the birth of her son, Shymaa posted a message addressed to her father on social media:

> *I have beautiful news for you, and I wish I could tell you while you were in front of me, handing you your first grandchild. Did you know that you have become a grandfather? … This is your grandson Abd al-Rahman, who I always imagined you holding. But I never imagined I would lose you so early, even before you saw him.*

A poem Alareer wrote for Shymaa in 2011 when she was a child has been translated into dozens of languages and seen written on subway platforms and protest signs around the world lately:

IF I MUST DIE

If I must die, you must live
To tell my story, to sell my things
To buy a piece of cloth and some strings,
(Make it white with a long tail)
So that a child, somewhere in Gaza
While looking heaven in the eye,
Making it blush under his gaze,
Awaiting his Dad who left in a blaze—
And bid no one farewell
Not even to his flesh, not even to himself—
Sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up above
And thinks for a moment an angel is there
Bringing back love.
If I must die, let it bring hope.
Let it be a tale.

In the following excerpt from *Gaza Writes Back: Short Stories from Young Writers in Gaza, Palestine*, a compilation edited by Alareer in 2014, he writes that during the time of Israel's offensive 2008–09 Operation Cast Lead, he discovered that "if Israel's apartheid has to be fought, Israel's narratives have to be challenged, and exposed." Alareer continues:

"It was then that I realized much of my mother's wisdom. For years, she told me and my siblings many stories. I gave my mother a grumpy how-many-more-times-are-you-going-to-tell-this-same-story face as she retold the same story, again and again. In response, my Mother, who gave birth to fourteen of us—eight boys and six girls, me being the second eldest—started experimenting with the stories, not only by adding new interesting details, but also by zooming in and out as she saw fit, to serve her purposes. The stories became more engaging. My Mom, through this rare act of compromise, must have realized that the purposes of telling us stories are a lot more important than simply keeping us quiet or even correcting our bad behaviors, like making us eat vegetables because the boy in the story who did not eat was easily carried away by a giant fly … My usually multitasking mother dedicated her everything to the story when she was telling one. The story appeared on her facial expressions, in her tone of voice, and through her gestures, and added solemnity to her already radiant face. My mother believed in her stories. And my mother's stories became and still are part of our lives. It was only later in life that I realized my mother's strong belief in the power of stories, and understood that there are several ways to tell the very same thing. Sometimes my mother asked us to tell our own stories or even to repeat one of hers. The stories gave my mother more authority and power; single voices, my mother must have believed, are blindly dangerous. As children living in the first Intifada, for us the stories of my mother and those of my grandparents were our solace, our escort in a blind world controlled by soldiers and guns and death. In part, they are responsible for the person I am today, although very few might have predicted that the reckless stone-thrower of the first Intifada would grow up to be an academic at university.

Despite the attacks, or rather more accurately because of them, I found myself telling my three kids, Shymaa, Omar, and Ahmed, either the same stories Mom told me, or different stories with similar themes, featuring my children as the heroes and saviors every now and then. Nothing broke the concentration except the intermittent "Boom! Boom!" sounds. That was how I spent most of the time, trying to make sure I was in the room least likely to take a hit from Israeli stray(!) missiles. The stories I told my kids and my brother's kids, who crowded the place and helped make the cold room warmer with their breath, were not mere pastime pleasures, nor were they prepared in a scholarly way. They just came out. Stories in Palestine just come out. You decide to tell stories and the stories just appear. The characters start to gather and then everything, to the amazement of the storyteller, unfolds. If charity begins at home, so too do stories. As a Palestinian, I have been brought up on stories and storytelling. It's both selfish and treacherous to keep a story to yourself—stories are meant to be told and retold. If I allowed a story to stop, I would be betraying my legacy, my mother, my grandmother, and my homeland. To me, storytelling is one of the ingredients of Palestinian sumud—steadfastness. Stories teach life even if the hero suffers or dies at the end. For Palestinians, stories whet the much-needed talent for life.

My stories were both an end and a means. As I told stories to my children to distract, soothe, and educate them, for the first time I felt very close to my mother, to what happened to her, and to my grandparents. The stories were my window to my mother's past, to my past, as I started living every minute she had to spend in the panic room her grandfather had prepared before Israel first invaded Gaza decades ago. My hair stands on end when she tells me of the many near-death experiences she or her family had to endure. The mere idea of my mother coming this close to death, just for being there, still transfixes me. … But my mother has outlived Israel's brutal invasion, and so have her stories. During the attack, the more bombs Israel detonated, the more stories I told, and the more I read. Telling stories was my way of resisting. It was all I could do.

Life on ICE

Continued from page 7

wanted to do direct action in detention, and organized networks of people on the outside that were willing to do the same. He helped us get hunger-strikers on the phone so we could talk to them through a megaphone when we rallied in front of detention centers demanding the migrants be released at the height of COVID.

Morales was the first of 11 hunger strikers to be released on humanitarian parole, but "basically everyone else who got released is also in the same situation as me right now" — fighting imminent deportation. Morales is now making his final appeal to the Board of Immigration to have his case re-reviewed by an immigration judge. He is arguing he should remain in the United States because his deportation will cause irreparable harm to his children and because he is an active member of his community in Hackettstown, where he has lived for 25 years.

"I can't make any plans right now," Morales says, "not for the future — for the restaurant, the kids; I wanted to buy a house — I don't know where I'll be in a couple months."

GUATEMALA

"Does it matter that the charges against me were dismissed? That I was a DACA recipient? That it wasn't ever my choice to come here? No," says Morales.

He exists in a limbo — accepted neither as American nor Guatemalan.

When Morales was 15, his father sent for him to come to New Jersey to take his place washing dishes in Italian restaurants. The eldest of nine children, he would now be the family breadwinner. His father returned home.

He never got a high-school degree, but made up for it by being a fast learner and dedicated worker. Over the years he had steady jobs in the restaurant business, got married and had three kids, and has helped all but one of his siblings come to the United States.

"People ask us why my [one remaining] brother doesn't come," jokes Morales. "We're all working like crazy up here! We send money home, and he doesn't have to work at all! Why would he leave?" he laughs.

"We were so poor there was a point where my clothes were all rags," Morales tells me when I ask why his dad left for the States.

It hadn't always been that way; his father was a farmer; they had some land and were getting by. Then two of his brothers were seriously injured, and the medical fees wrecked the family's finances.

Morales said, "When I first came here, I always planned on moving back," but now he's not so sure.

He returned to Guatemala for the first time not long before his 2018 arrest. Initially planning to stay for a month, but he left sooner, feeling disconnected from his childhood home.

"The way I spoke Spanish was different; my haircut was different. I was from the village, but everyone saw me as a foreigner," explained Morales.

Still, he remains proud of his native land. "My kids say they're Guatemalan, you know, that makes me feel good."

OUT OF JAIL, NOT FREE

For now, home for Morales is Annabella's in Parsippany, NJ. It's the only place where he feels he has agency. Being under ICE's Intensive Supervision Appearance Program (ISAP) is taking its toll. He's under constant surveillance by a software called BI SmartLINK. ICE has the right to track him or listen in on him whenever they want. He's not allowed to travel outside a 200-mile radius without putting in a request two weeks ahead of time. And even though ICE can access his location anytime they want, he still has to do regular check-ins. Sometimes he has to go to the local ICE office, sometimes an ICE agent comes to him, but often he has to do an at-home check in. This entails taking the day off work and staying home for an eight-hour period during which an ICE agent will videochat him at any point just to show he's in his apartment.

"Taking multiple days off a month is hard," Morales explains, "because I just make enough money each month to pay for rent and the $20,000 in legal fees I have to pay off."

The combination of his uncertain future and the trauma he experienced behind bars has caused Morales to struggle with his mental health for the first time.

"I used to be able to work around any problem that did come up," he says. "Now, the smallest things can throw me off." For anyone experiencing anxiety, it's a familiar story.

When Morales and I first met, he still couldn't eat regular meals because his body was readjusting from hunger strike. He almost never slept. But shortly thereafter, he had a little more pep in his step. He and his brother bought Annabella's from their old boss; he was coordinating a network of people that had committed themselves to ending ICE detention in North Jersey. In ways he felt more liberated. He had just — after being told by countless jail and ICE staff he would fail — freed himself from behind bars through direct action.

Now, after two years fighting deportation from the outside, you can see in Morales' hardened expressions the hellscape he's been navigating. But he's still fighting.

"I'm free — I mean, I'm walking here, but I basically — I still have a jail cell. I have fencing around me, so I still am not completely free. I cannot say, 'Alright, today is Wednesday, I want to spend the weekend in Ohio.' They're tracking me. So I don't have my freedom back yet."

Campus protests

Continued from page 11

complex known as Cop City to train police in more urban battlefield techniques so that future revolts can be more quickly suppressed. While the struggle in Atlanta has drawn national attention, scores of other cop cities are now being built across the country.

America's universities are increasingly led by people who have little to no background as educators. Columbia's President Nemat (Minouche) Shafik, for example, is a baroness from England who has spent much of her professional career working as an economist at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

In hindsight, we can see the encampment movement as the product of a perfect storm of circumstances.

An idealistic, left-leaning generation of young people watched in horror as history's first live-streamed genocide unfolded over months on their phones. A president and a political class slavishly devoted to Israel ignored months of protests in the streets; he ignored historic electoral efforts like the "Uncommitted" vote in Michigan's Democratic presidential primary and other states that followed suit. With nowhere left to turn, college students threw down their tents on the campus lawn and demanded that their colleges cut ties with Israel and the companies that profit from the mass murder and oppression of the Palestinians.

Neoliberal university presidents, disconnected from the communities they lead, panicked and called the cops on their own students. The police, imbued in years of warrior-cop ideology and eager to show off their military toys, acted like they were in a combat zone with predictably appalling results. Any fool with an ounce of common sense could have anticipated that the campuses would erupt. Each new encampment that went up and police crackdown that followed inspired students at other schools to also stand up for their beliefs, regardless of the consequences.

• • •

The events of the past month have given tens of thousands of young people an education in how power works and how to organize against it — something that no classroom could have provided. The establishment is responding to the upsurge in dissent with draconian new laws to suppress criticism such as the Antisemitism Awareness Act, which, as *The Indy* goes to press, passed the House with strong bipartisan support and awaits Senate action.

So what comes next?

After being battered by the police and facing down their university overlords, pro-Palestinian student activists will have the summer to regroup and make their presence felt in August at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

They will face a president who, given a choice between preserving his fragile electoral coalition that prevailed in 2020 or supporting a genocide and risking Donald Trump's return to power, has consistently chosen the latter.

At this late moment it may have finally dawned on Team Biden that this is an unsustainable course. After all the death and destruction in Palestine, there will be protests at the convention in Chicago regardless. But if the war on Gaza grinds on through the summer without a ceasefire — if there is bloodbath in Rafah or the war expands to other countries, as Israel's leaders have signaled they would like to do — the size and intensity of the Chicago demonstrations could make this spring's campus protests look like a garden tea party. And that would likely be followed by more campus unrest in the fall as the presidential race reaches its crescendo.

• • •

I recently had lunch with an old friend who was surprised when I ticked off the many pro-union initiatives coming from the Biden administration and its appointees on the National Labor Relations Board. She was happy to hear the news, but it wasn't going to change how she voted in the fall. "If I vote for him," she lamented, "I would be supporting a genocide."

Biden has lost many many voters, like my friend, who don't want to have to walk over the bodies of dead children to get a president who supports unions, is willing to enforce antitrust laws against monopolies and who will support a woman's right to choose in post-Roe America. These are just a few of the accomplishments of the most progressive president on domestic issues since the 1960s. With the exception of abortion rights, Biden's domestic record is barely noticed.

Taking an off-ramp from Gaza would allow him to make his case to disenchanted supporters. He could also start mending the fractures in the broad coalition that's needed to defeat Trump and the openly fascist movement that has coalesced around him.

In his long political career, Biden learned that no U.S. politician has ever suffered for having supported Israel while many have seen their careers abruptly ended when they didn't. The rules of that game are fast changing. For both moral and political reasons, Biden should acknowledge that the kids are right and act accordingly.

LAURA JANE BRETT

LABOR BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

KEEP PUSHING: *Starbucks workers rallying in Lower Manhattan in December 2022.*

UAW WINS BIG IN TENNESSEE, ALABAMA NEXT?

The United Auto Workers scored a major victory in April when more than 70% of the employees at Volkswagen's Chattanooga, Tenn., plant voted for union representation. The vote, the first union win at a foreign-owned auto plant in the South, came after defeats in 2014 and 2019. After winning large raises last November after a strike against General Motors, Ford and Stellantis, the UAW launched a campaign in February to organize 150,000 workers at 13 nonunion manufacturers, primarily in the hostile environment of the South. "Once they won their contract, it changed a lot of people from anti-union to pro-union members," VW worker Yolanda Peoples told *Labor Notes*.

STARBUCKS UNION & COMPANY BEGIN BARGAINING

More than two years after Starbucks baristas formed their first union, the company held its first bargaining session with Starbucks Workers United, which now represents workers at more than 425 of the company's 9,000 U.S. stores. The April 24–25 session "made significant progress," the union and Starbucks said in a joint statement. The talks began after Starbucks dropped its refusal to let any workers participate in the talks remotely, instead of in person. "The road has been a long one, but it's finally happening!" Starbucks Workers United said April 29. The next session is scheduled for late May. Contracts will be negotiated and ratified separately at individual stores, but the union said it wants to achieve "a foundational framework" that would be the basis of each single-store contract. Meanwhile, on May 7, workers at Starbucks stores in Downtown Brooklyn and Port Jefferson on Long Island filed petitions to have their unions recognized.

LEGAL-SERVICE WORKERS' STRIKE ENTERS 11TH WEEK

Members of the Mobilization for Justice Union called on the City Council May 7 to cut off funding to the legal-services organization until their 11-week-old strike is resolved. Mobilization for Justice, which represents low-income people on civil issues such as eviction and immigration, receives more than one-third of its $25 million annual budget from the City Human Resources Administration. The 109 union workers (members of UAW Local 2320, the Legal Services Staff Association) walked out in late February after overwhelmingly rejecting a proposed contract. Their main issues are winning pay raises that keep up with inflation instead of the 2% or 3% management has offered, management's use of temporary workers, and reducing burnout. The strike is the longest in New York City legal-services history since a 15-week walkout in 1991.

SUPREME COURT EYES MAKING UNION-BUSTING EASIER

Starbucks is asking the Supreme Court to make it harder for the National Labor Relations Board to get federal courts to order employers to reinstate workers it has "reasonable cause to believe" were illegally fired for union activity. The company, challenging an order to reinstate seven Memphis workers it fired in 2022, argues that federal labor law which gives the NLRB that power is unconstitutional, and that the workers should have to wait until federal courts rule they were illegally terminated. The NLRB's administrative judges have found that Starbucks illegally fired 59 union leaders and supporters, a group of current and former baristas stated in an amicus brief. In oral arguments Apr. 24, the Court's far-right justices appeared unsympathetic.

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JIM WEST

MAKING GOOD TROUBLE: *UAW President Shawn Fain held up a dog-eared copy of the Labor Notes classic, A Troublemaker's Handbook, in his closing speech at the 2024 conference.*

Bigger than ever

An exhilarating Labor Notes Conference shows the working class is standing up

By Eric Dirnbach

Recently in front of a standing-room only crowd of more than 4,000 labor activists, United Auto Workers (UAW) President Shawn Fain said, "Something is happening in this country. Something we haven't seen in a long, long time. The working class is standing up!"

That spirit was everywhere at the recent Labor Notes conference. Labor Notes is a monthly labor newsletter and organizing training project that was founded in 1979. It also hosts a conference every two years, and it's getting bigger. This year in Chicago, over 4,700 people attended, and the energy was intense. I have been to a half dozen Labor Notes conferences, and this huge gathering of the left wing of the labor movement is always energizing.

At over 300 packed workshops and panel discussions throughout the weekend, attendees discussed workplace organizing basics, effective collective bargaining, union democracy, and how to push on aggressively with the revival of the labor movement that feels very real. Labor Notes has made recordings of the main sessions available.

The conference is happening amidst what may be the beginning of a union upsurge in the United States. The number of union elections, workers organized through elections and union strikes have risen in the last few years. The popularity of unions is at a near-record high of 67% approval, according to Gallup's latest annual survey.

Younger Gen Z workers in particular are interested in unions, as a response to economic uncertainty exposed so well by the recent pandemic. Union contract settlements won first year raises of 6.6% last year — the highest in decades. These trends are all encouraging, but we have yet to see them translate into an increase in the union membership rate, the percentage of all workers who are union members. Last year it continued to drop and is now about 10% of the workforce.

Decades of defensive and complacent unionism has enabled this loss of membership. The folks at Labor Notes are the union members and activists that most urgently want to reverse this decline with a bolder unionism that features militant, member participation.

The NewsGuild, affiliated with the Communications Workers of America (CWA), is a good example of this, and they had over 100 members at the conference. The union has won dozens of strikes so far this year and has a highly regarded member organizing program. Organizer Stephanie Basile says that "newspaper workers have shared experiences and challenges in their workplace organizing, and by connecting them to discuss and brainstorm, they have the opportunity to directly learn from each other." The program has helped the union organize over 10,000 new members at 250 workplaces over the last decade.

It was inspiring to see so many young Starbucks Workers United members at the conference — especially after their breakthrough announcement that the company has agreed to start bargaining a contract. Negotiations have since begun, after the union won 400 store elections and staged many strikes nationwide over the past few years. The conference featured a screening and discussion of a great new documentary, The Empty Chair, about the Starbucks union campaign. The film featured a lot of the barista union activists, many of whom are LGBTQ+.

The "empty chair" refers to a concept so vacuous that it can only come from a CEO. It's the practice of having an empty chair at Starbucks Board meetings to remind the executives of the workers. Rather than being "represented" by a sad, voiceless chair, the Starbucks workers have built an organization that is actually doing the job.

I enjoyed the workshop held by the Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee (EWOC) called "Our Labor Movement is Multi-Generational," which featured activists providing mentorship and experience from Boomers to Gen Z. I particularly liked hearing EWOC volunteer Terry Davis talk about her experiences at finding work at a manufacturing plant in Chicago in the 1970s to organize with the United Electrical (UE) union. A lot of young workers are doing this today — getting jobs with the intention of organizing a new union, often called "salting," or improving the union already there.

UE is a sponsoring partner of EWOC, along with the Democratic Socialists of America. EWOC is a project that started at the beginning of the pandemic to help workers organize unions and has just published a brand new Unite and Win organizing manual.

At the conference, I facilitated a session on "Pre-Majority Unionism," which is an organizing strategy where workers have a union and win improvements even without official employer recognition and a contract. One of our panelists, organizer Allison Becha, discussed how the United Campus Workers (UCW), affiliated with CWA, has organized for wins at many public universities in over a dozen states. They have accomplished this without a contract, as they are organizing in many states without collective bargaining rights for public employees. As part of an EWOC research project, I wrote a report with case studies on this strategy, including one of UCW.

The UAW had a heavy presence at the conference, and it's members are on fire right now. After their "Stand Up" strike and stunning contract victory at the Big Three automakers last year, they have moved aggressively to organize non-union factories with 150,000 workers, including throughout the South. With amazing timing, their decisive win with over 4,000 workers at Volkswagen in Chattanooga, TN, was announced during the conference. Their next big election is at a Mercedes plant in Alabama from May 13-17.

The UAW has even urged other unions to align their contracts expirations for May 1, 2028 so we can have a general strike! The general strike, where many unions and potentially tens or hundreds of thousands of workers strike together, is a concept usually encountered in history books or other countries. The fact that it's a live conversation in the United States today is amazing.

The "Organizing the South" session was in a large packed room and featured a teacher, call-center worker, nurse, retail worker, and a worker from a non-union auto plant that is organizing with the UAW. Indeed, whether the UAW and other union campaigns can revitalize large-scale union organizing in the South is a crucial question. Eleven states, mostly in the South, have union membership rates below 5%, which results in more conservative politics that have national ramifications.

LABOR & PALESTINE

Palestine had an important presence at the conference. A number of workshops discussed organizing around a ceasefire and in support of Palestine, and many attendees were wearing a keffiyeh. Outside the conference, a protest against the genocide drew many cops. This resulted in two arrests, but the protesters and Labor Notes staff were able to de-arrest the folks.

Union renewal is always a big theme at the conference. Indeed, the UAW's revival has been enabled by the victory of the Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) slate in the last UAW elections, which elevated Fain to the presidency.

At a session called "Be the Union You Want to Be," members from a number of unions discussed their efforts to inject more militant strategies into their unions. The facilitator was Jackson Potter, Vice President of the Chicago Teachers Union. CTU inspired the whole labor movement when a reform slate took over the union and led a huge strike in 2012 to fight off education austerity in Chicago. This influenced other teachers unions, leading to the famous "Red for Ed" strike wave in 2018-2019. Former CTU member Brandon Johnson is now the mayor of Chicago, and he also spoke at the conference.

During his speech, Fain mentioned that he travels with his grandmother's bible, but at work his other bible has been Labor Notes' Troublemaker's Handbook. Fain said, "This Bible taught me another kind of faith. It taught me faith in the membership. It taught me faith in the working class. And it is that faith that carried the UAW to our new chapter in history." It's a fantastic resource that's sadly out of print, but Labor Notes has now made it available for a free download.

The next Labor Notes conference may be even larger, and I hope so. Labor Notes staff estimated that thousands were on the waiting list and that with a larger venue, they could have had 8,000–10,000 people in attendance. If you're interested in the 2026 conference, register early!

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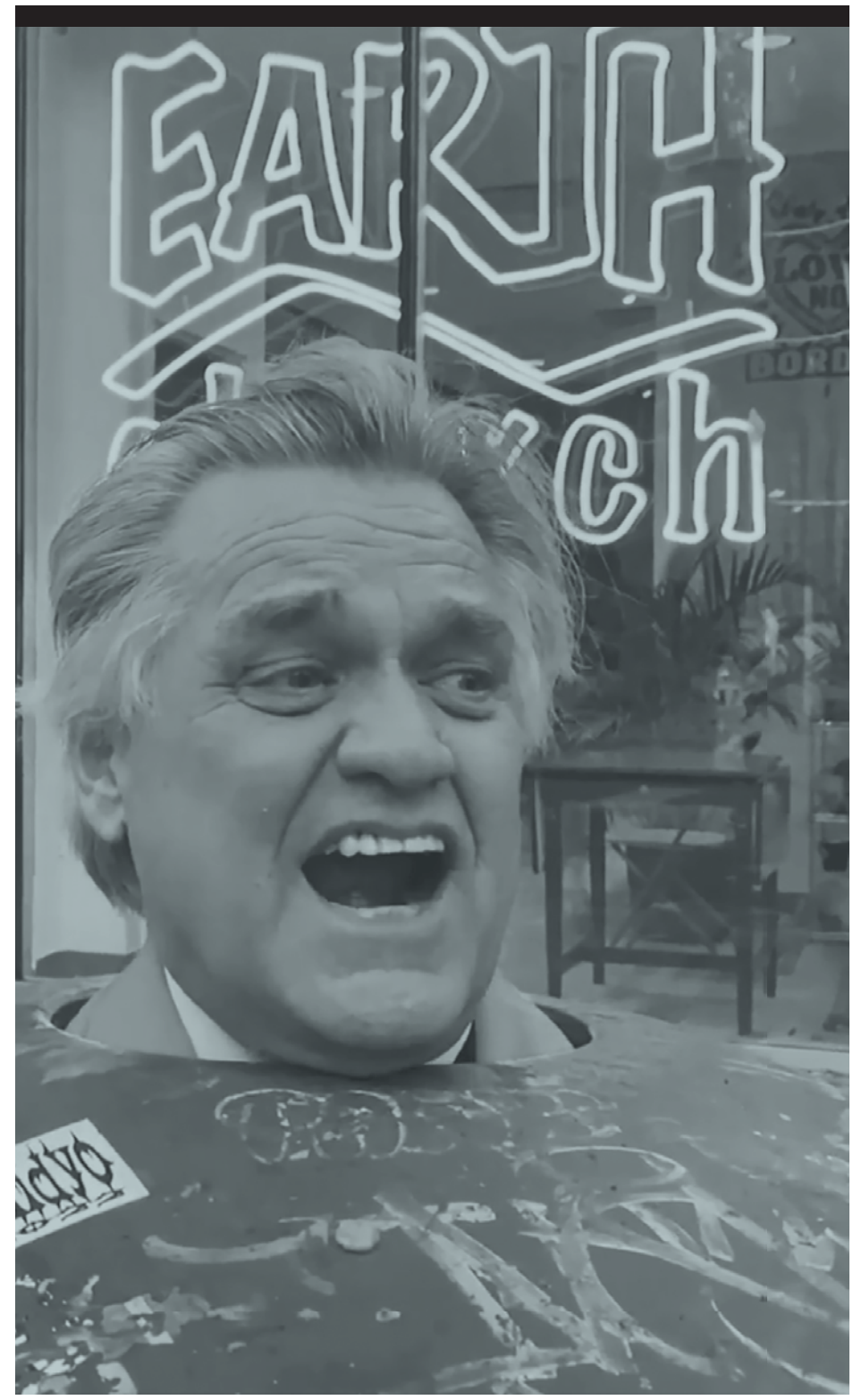

REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS

Reverend Billy & the Church of Stop Shopping Choir are touring the country this spring as the warm-up act for Neil Young and Crazy Horse. We recently received this dispatch from Reverend Billy after the first week of the tour. We look forward to our wayward advice columnist returning to his familiar perch when the tour is over.

Two shows in San Diego and one in Phoenix so far — 27 shows to go. Writing from the Love Earth Tour bus in Texas, on the edge of New Mexico. Wednesday night we are back on stage in Austin, Texas, near the Austin Gaza Solidarity Encampment. As I write this, the singers and our director Savitri D have gone to the border bridge from Juarez to El Paso to sing and meditate on our neighbors' long walks of hope.

The powerful thing about this experiment is that we are talking directly to people about the Earth's crisis. It's not graphics, mass mailings or social media's pixels. In the first three shows, the choir and I played to 21,000 people. Our job is like an opening act, but we are also hosting the event of the LOVE EARTH tour. Neil and his partner Daryl Hannah are serious environmentalists, and they came to us to help them dramatize the meaning of the tour before Neil and Crazy Horse emerge with "Rockin' in the Free World."

Moving from our storefront Earth Church in the East Village, we gasped at the shift in scale, like a pleasurable version of getting the bends. When we wake up in the bus the morning after a show, the joy we feel is that we have blasted into the sweeping landscape of people messages like "Let's make new kind of activism for the Earth!" ...and "Can we be strange enough to change enough?" ...and "Love is the Earth's radical gift." Earthalujah!

REVEREND BILLY TALEN IS THE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF STOP SHOPPING. HAVE A QUESTION FOR THE REVEREND? EMAIL REVBILLY@REVBILLY.COM AND UNBURDEN YOUR SOUL.

Poetry from behind the walls

No Moon
Performed by Spoon Jackson
Produced by Nicholas Snyder
FREER Records, 2024

By Moira Marquis

"As artists, we have to change the narrative." Spoon Jackson's voice comes through the phone like an old record, vaguely scratchy and deep. He's calling from the California prison where he's been incarcerated for the last 47 years. The narrative he's talking about is the story the United States tells about the people we punish with this isolation — that they're irrevocably dangerous and we're safer because we throw them away. Jackson's poetry, and now music, push back against this facile understanding asking us to complicate ideas of harm and healing.

BRIAN GOODWIN

OVER THE MOON: *Fury Young (right), founder of FREER Records, celebrates the release of the No Moon album with his mother, Aliza Brozgold.*

The people who've gathered at P.I.T. in South Williamsburg to listen to Jackson's newly released album, *No Moon*, stand rapt. FREER Records founder Fury Young holds the phone to a microphone as the album's composer and producer Nicholas Snyder asks Jackson about their collaboration. Jackson's voice replies it "came about like the wind." Snyder quips to the crowd that Jackson waxes nothing but poetics.

FREER is the only record label in the United States that publishes music by currently- and formerly-incarcerated musicians. Young met Jackson 10 years ago, and the two have collaborated on various projects, but *No Moon* is Jackson's first album created collaboratively with Snyder, a composer based in California who saw FREER's Instagram post seeking composers and producers willing to work with incarcerated musicians.

Snyder says after responding to the Instagram post, Young "sent me a phone recording of Spoon reciting his poem 'Sag,' which is not what I expected, but I felt its power. I built up music around it in a two-day flurry and was really excited by the track. It was almost a surprise to me how good the song felt, how fresh and real it was. After that I wanted to make a whole album like that, and Fury put me in direct contact with Spoon."

No Moon features Jackson's poetry and Snyder's music. When Snyder first reached out, Jackson was in the prison system's ICU with COVID-19. "He was in rough shape," said Snyder. "I didn't know if I'd ever hear from him, but a few months passed and I got a call from Solano State Penitentiary. We've been chatting on the phone every week or two since then."

Jackson's poems are mystical meditations from someone who has spent a lot of time considering life in all its complexity. This spoken-word poetry forms the basis of each of the 14 songs on the album. Snyder recorded Jackson through the telephone. "All of the vocals were recorded via the phone. You can't bring a recorder into his facility. I would record him reciting a poem, build music around it and play it to him just holding the phone up to my studio monitors." After listening to the poems, Snyder crafted sonic soundscapes around them.

These barriers to communication with the outside world, designed to silence incarcerated people, have been artistically used to create complex and rich lo-fi sound quality that is a welcome relief from the overly produced audio we hear so often today. The pops and crackles of the phone line are interspersed with "computer lady" — also the name of one of the songs — a pre-recorded voice of the telecom giant JPay, one of the two major companies that profit from and control carceral communications. This canned voice announces the limited time of the call, that it's being recorded and that your conversant is incarcerated.

At the listening party, the computer lady interrupts Jackson mid-sentence, her volume causing feedback on the mic, making attendees cringe. On the album, Snyder has leveled her interruptions so they form part of the background to Jackson, but in person, you realize anew the arrogance of this audio assault. "It's designed to never let you forget you're talking to someone who's incarcerated," Snyder tells the crowd.

After Jackson's last phone call — he gets cut off every 15 minutes and has to call back, per prison rules — Young puts on the album. Images of the lyrics and Jackson are projected on the wall of the space. People stand and watch the lyrics change, following the flow of words and images Jackson and Snyder have created. People line up to purchase a tape of the album.

This would be a great album to have on tape. Sonically, it fits. The tape is a little piece of history in more ways than one.

P.I.T's space is welcoming, and the mood created with Jackson's words and Snyder's music leaves people lingering — not wanting to step into the Brooklyn night rumbling with trains and cars, devoid of poetry. It's a good thing. A silence has been broken; a connection made and perhaps a narrative shifted.

You can pick up a tape of the album at P.I.T. or stream it via freerrecords.com/no-moon-buy-stream. Follow FREER Records on Instagram @freer_records to listen to some amazing music and get involved in supporting incarcerated musicians. For more events at P.I.T. check out their Instagram @the_p.i.t._ or their website, propertyistheft.org.

No Justice

Continued from page 9

alleged confession, one of the reports calls attention (by name) to a key figure in the DA's office. The Malik recap emphasizes the key supporting role in the investigation played by Homicide Bureau chief Ken Taub, who steered a veteran jailhouse informant and perjurer to the case prosecutors. In a story that the CRU deemed "patently incredible," the career snitch claimed that Malik and Ellerbe had indeed been inspired by a token-booth fire scene in *The Money Train*.

As bureau chief through the end of the Hynes era, Taub oversaw countless murder cases. On a few occasions, Scarcella has testified about the involvement of Taub's top deputy Jon Besunder in approving many of his arrests.

However egregious Scarcella's actions were, prosecutors remain ultimately responsible for the faulty convictions. "Detective Scarcella did not operate in a vacuum," Ken Thompson stated on the 2013 campaign trail. "He worked hand-in-hand with the DA's office."

Lori Grifa is currently a New Jersey family court judge. Joe Alexis is a high-ranking member of Brooklyn DA Eric Gonzalez's office. And Jonathan Frank is a partner at one of Manhattan's top corporate law firms. When this reporter bumped into Scarcella recently, the retired detective appeared to be doing just fine.

While Harry Kaufman's actual killers went free, Thomas Malik, Vincent Ellerbe and James Irons spent more than 75 combined years locked up for a heinous crime they didn't commit. As Ellerbe explained in a gripping post-exoneration conversation, the scars of his wrongful incarceration will never heal.

"It was one of the most emotional cases all of us ever got involved in," Scarcella told *Daily News* after Ellerbe's verdict wrapped up the *Money Train* convictions. Alas, it's also a story in which only some of the participants lived happily ever after.

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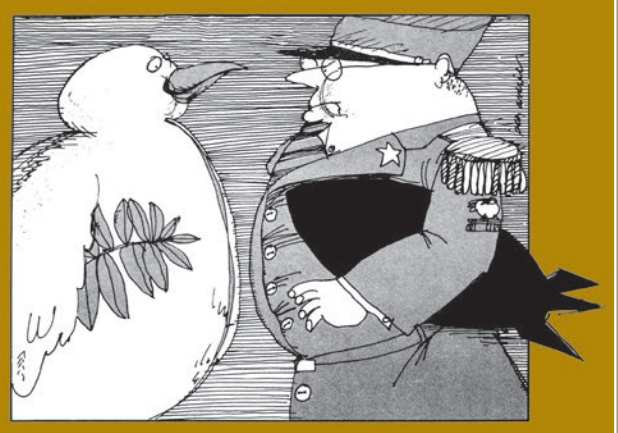

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